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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the highlights of the literature dealing with multicultural education and cultural pluralism. Bibliographies dealing with multicultural education contain a large body of literature. For the most part the literature reflects confusion as to the best goals and strategies of this curriculum concept. The literature also indicates a belief that this approach to education will foster the ideal of cultural pluralism as opposed to the ideal of assimilation in American society. The literature also includes many treatises dealing with the importance of teachers and their training in this new education effort. Although the quantity of the literature reflects a great amount of interest in this new educational goal, there are some reservations. Although the concept is favored, there is some skepticism due to the many unanswered questions which accompany the various ways of implementing the multicultural concept. The second part of the paper is devoted to the many questions and issues raised in public school circles by the trend towards multicultural education. These questions are many and varied, involving the philosophy and goals of schooling, and school priorities in the education of students. It is concluded that the present trend in modern education is towards basic competencies, job survival skills, and universal communication skills. A crucial issue confronting multicultural education is whether it can meet these new and publicly demanded goals. (Author/AM)

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THE ACTUALIZATION OF A NEW IDEAL.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: FACTS AND SOME FANTASY

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ABSTRACT

The Actualization of a New Ideal. Multicultural Educational Programs: Facts and Some Fantasy.

Dr. R. V. Farrell

This paper reviews the highlights of the literature dealing with multicultural education and its accompanying ideal of cultural pluralism. An effort is made to examine the program reality of multicultural education in school systems. Finally, some unanswered questions dealing with the implementation of multicultural education in American schools are presented and discussed.

This paper stems from my own personal curiosity about a topic that seems to be very popular in contemporary educational circles...This topic is, of course, "multicultural education." As a former high school teacher, and as a professor of education, I am of course, very interested in this new curriculum concept--or curriculum ideology, depending on who you are reading--and its meaning and implications for the ongoing process of American schooling. For that reason I began my quest for understanding--the results of this quest I will now attempt to share with you.

My quest to get at the roots of multicultural education of course began with a survey of the current literature. I immediately encountered a multitude of books, articles, pamphlets, guidelines, and position papers which dealt with multicultural education and its associated goal of cultural pluralism. In the first part of this paper I will endeavor to relate to you my impressions of this body of literature, the many efforts to define and redefine multicultural education by an impressive body of individual scholars and groups. There is no doubt about it, there is an extraordinary amount of positive interest in this subject. As we will also see, there are also some reservations.

The second part of the paper will deal with the overall quantitative and qualitative impact of multicultural education on schooling in America. Here we will be looking at multicultural education in terms of programmatic actualization. This section I found to be the most difficult to research, since when you leave the realm of the abstract, the body of literature is less extensive.

These first two sections of the paper in essence serve as background for what I consider the most important part of my quest for meaning and truth. This final section deals with the many questions and issues raised by the concept of multicultural education as a curriculum stragegy as it is currently being proposed and implemented in public schools across the United States. These questions, which in the main remain unasnwered, raise many problems for educators who are involved in the actualization of multicultural education strategies. Hopefully, at the end of this presentation we will have time for an open discussion of some these problems.

There is no denying the high level of interest in the topic of multicultural education, and in the new educational ideal of cultural pluralism. A number of bibliographies have appeared which underline this growing interest. The most recent which deals specifically with multicultural education is Ann Finnan's Multicultural Education, An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Fordham University Component of the New York State Teacher Corps Network, 1976).

The quantity of literature indicated by these bibliographies is one thing. The main question to be answered, though, is what does the literature say. It is my impression that initially, there was much confusion among the advocates of multiculturalism. There was, and still is in many respects, confusion as to the best goals and strategies of this curriculum concept. Some authors believed that the whole school environment should be multicultural, fostering multicultural understanding. Other authors, and I may add, school systems, defined multicultural education in terms of small modifications in the ongoing school curricula, like the addition of elective course dealing with ethnic and racial minorities, which individuals could select if they were interested in the topic. The initial looseness of the term "multicultural education" was evident, and various

authors began to call for a tightening up of the concept. Perhaps chief among these is James A. Banks, an outspoken initial advocate of multicultural education, who has more recently changed his advocation to the support of multi-ethnic education. I found his article entitled "Cultural Pluralism and Contemporary Schools," which appeared in the January/February 1976 issue of Integrated Education to be quite refreshing. In it Dr. Banks points out that the term multicultural education resulted from a loosely defined philosophy responding to militant demands of the 1960's. The term is used to define many programs and practices common to schools (My interview with teachers here in Dade County have indicated their interpretation of the term to be quite broad. One teacher listed just about every course and program in her school, from modern languages to Drama Club, when asked to describe multicultural education programs). Banks sees a need for a more clear cut definition, and by calling for specific guidelines and clarification I believe he has performed an important service.

Returning now to the evident growing interest in multicultural education, the literature indicates a belief that this approach to education will foster the ideal of cultural pluralism as opposed to the ideal of assimilation (that old melting pot) in American society. With catchy titles like "America in Search of a New Ideal: An Essay on the Rise of Pluralism," and "One Species, Many Cultures," this body of literature outlines a new direction for American education--the fostering of understanding and awareness of cultural/ethnic diversity through the recognition and study of cultural/ethnic differences. This literature makes for interesting reading and contemplation, since it supports a radical philosophical revolution in American educational circles. It underlines the inherent problems with the assimilation ideal in public schools, but in the main offers very few

"how to" strategies for the achievement of the new ideal of cultural pluralism.

Another contribution to this growing body of literature on multicultural education includes very idealistic treatments which see this curriculum concept as a key to a blissful and happy future, for the country and the world. Such titles as "To Make the Nation Greater," "A Key to Desegregation," and "As Preparation for World Citizenship" can be included in this group.

The literature also includes many treatises dealing with the importance of teachers and their training in this new education effort. The utilization of Competency-Based Teacher Education to implement the new ideal of cultural pluralism is a common topic among teacher educators, and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) has gone on record saying that there is no "one model American," even issuing a publication with the same title. This year, 1977, the AACTE has published Pluralism and the American Teacher, Issues and Case Studies--a clear attempt to underline the importance of teacher training for the successful implementation of multicultural education. Many of the basic texts used in Teacher Education now also include sections dealing with Cultural Pluralism as the new American ideal--with the goals of "mutual appreciation, cooperation... peaceful coexistence...and autonomy." Even the sixth edition of that old standby text, Ehlers' Crucial Issues in Education, includes a section dealing with Pluralism and Assimilation.

Finally, we see a number of other indications of the growing interest in multicultural education in school and public circles. Journals like Educational Leadership and the Kappan, to name only two, have devoted entire issues or large segments of issues to multicultural education and cultural pluralism. Such educational research centers as the Far West

Laboratory for Educational Research and Development and the Institute of International Studies have indicated interest through their publications. Finally, state governments have published extensively in these areas. As early as 1973 over half of the 50 states had published materials dealing with ethnicity and the utilization of this topic in school curriculums. Over half also had policy statements on ethnic studies. By 1975, 20 had laws on the books which mandated multicultural, bilingual, or ethnic studies in the curricula of public schools. A number of local communities have also sponsored multiethnic curriculum studies and projects resulting in curriculum materials.

Professional associations, like the National Council of Social Studies, also have evidenced interest in this concept of multiculturalism. In fact, an NCSS Task Force on Ethnic Studies, headed by James A. Banks, published Curriculum Guidelines for Multiethnic Education in 1976, in which an attempt is made to clarify and conceptualize the idea of multiculturalism in schools. To do this, the concept of multiethnic education was adopted so school programs dealing with cultural pluralism would be based on race and ethnicity, and not on the broader concept of culture. This work is considered a seminal guideline which will help orient a school in the right direction in terms of its general educational goals. The how of it must be looked for in other publications. Perhaps the real importance of this guideline is that it emphasizes the idea that multiethnicity should be a fundamental ideology of schooling.

Finally, the Federal Government is of course a positive factor in supporting and advocating multiculturalism in public schools. The Ethnic Heritage Act of 1972 has resulted in many projects geared for the development of materials for this broad curriculum area. The aim of the Act is once again to foster self-identity, mutual understanding and community

cooperation. Noble ideals. The government's interest in Bilingual Education, Indian Education, and Cuban Education, also point in the direction of multiculturalism.

With all this positive interest, I suppose people might think that there are no reservations regarding this new educational goal. Well, not so. Even strong advocates of the concept have found fault with its implementation. Too often multicultural education is attached as a label to ongoing activities of the school curriculum. I have already referred to this above. Also, much too often school systems seem to attach this label to single or multiple courses that treat ethnic or racial groups--like Black Studies, Asian Studies--that are often considered fringe curricula. This is pointed out by a number of publications I have encountered. So often these courses are electives or glamour offerings--a clear challenge to the multiculturalism goals of such organizations like the NCSS. Some authors have also noted the decline of interest in such high school courses as Black Studies in the early 1970's (my informal observations and inquiries also seems to confirm this fact), as other subject priorities, like ecology, career education, and basic skill competencies began to gain attention.

Still other writers, while favoring the concept, have a tinge of skepticism in their arguments due to the many unanswered questions which seem to accompany the multicultural concept. I would include in this group, some of the early writings of Banks, when he notes the parochial nature of many multicultural education programs, and the contradictions these programs present in relation to the cultural foundations of public schooling. We will return to these ideas below.

Other articles could be considered to have deeper reservations, but not to be totally opposed to the concept of

multicultural education. The latest of this group which I encountered appeared in the January 1977 issue of the Kappan Magazine. The author, Philip I. Freedman, also raises some critical questions regarding the implementation of multiethnic/multicultural studies in terms of contradictions with the major goals of schooling.

My overview of the literature on multicultural education seems to indicate a groundswell in the United States in terms of this new curriculum concept. The quantitative implications of this interest, however, are not that easily obtained. Frankly, even for school districts that profess to have ongoing multiethnic programs, it is often difficult to estimate their total impact on the system. Even in a city like Ann Arbor, Michigan, where a three year multiethnic project was implemented, it is difficult to gage the real impact when the superintendent uses such phrases as "multicultural education is a reality in all of our schools, to varying degrees." Short of onsight observation in every school, it is difficult to say to what degree.

There are general overviews of the quantitative impact of ethnic/cultural studies in the United States. For example, a December 1975 survey which appeared in Educational Leadership, seems to indicate a relatively small number of pupils in 750 school districts surveyed as being directly touched by multicultural education programs. Only 40% of the districts reported having any form of ethnic studies, and most of the programs had been established in the 1969-1972 time period, with a tapering off in the establishment of new programs in the mid 1970's. As a concluding statement, the author offers the following: "The tragedy is that the core of concern represents an apparent minority of the school districts serving student populations of ten thousand or more and that these programs have been so long in coming."

A more recent survey of the quantitative impact of multiculturalism on educational systems in the U.S. appears in the 1977 AACTE publication Pluralism and the American Teacher. Harry N. Rivlin, in his chapter entitled "Research and Development in Multicultural Education" refers to a survey of the superintendents of 31 American cities with populations over 200,000. The 17 that returned the survey questionnaire indicated wide interest in multicultural education through courses, materials, and other programs. But again, it is difficult to gage the real impact of multicultural education through such information.

In terms of the types of programs that have been initiated or should be initiated, various labeling schemes have been presented which have helped me to categorize the various approaches to multicultural/multiethnic education. James A. Banks offers the view that programs dealing with ethnicity can fall within three broad categories. The first is called the Cultural Pluralism ideology, in which separatism, ethnic pride and group integrity take precedence. This approach or ideology stems from the radical philosophies which dominated the Black, Brown, Yellow and Red revolutions of the 1960's. Another approach to ethnicism is the traditional approach of assimilation, where ethnicity must give way to total universalism, to complete integration with the dominant value system. Finally, the approach favored by Banks, is the Pluralist-Assimilationist Ideology which wants the best of both worlds: recognition of ethnic/cultural differences, appreciation and understanding, while at the same time preserving common cultural values and traditions.

Finally, probably the most valuable contribution, at least for me, to the body of literature attempting to define the many approaches to multicultural education is a recent article by Margaret Alison Gibson entitled

"Approaches to Multicultural Education in the U.S.: Some Concepts and Assumptions." (Anthropology and Education Quarterly, November, 1976) This article is extremely helpful in categorizing the various approaches to multicultural education. Dr. Gibson, in an effort to increase conceptual clarity (which she notes is sorely lacking in this movement) presents four models of ongoing multicultural education programs. The realities of the "how to" in terms of implementing these programs are not included, although the reader gets a pretty clear idea of general strategies and assumptions from the author's discussion. The first model she labels Benevolent Multiculturalism. It involves programs that are intended to help equalize the educational opportunities of minority groups, and is intended for these groups only. The second model, which she calls the Cultural Understanding Model, is intended for all students in public schools. The explicit goal of this approach to multicultural education is to enhance the value and understanding of cultural differences, and by so doing, to indirectly decrease racism and prejudice among public school students. The third model is called Education for Cultural Pluralism. It is intended to "preserve and extend cultural pluralism--to promote cultural pluralism." As such, it resembles at least partially the goals of the NCSS guidelines already mentioned above, which suggest that through curricular programing we implement a new ideal for schooling in America--the promotion of ethnic diversity. Finally, the fourth model Dr. Gibson calls the Bicultural Education Model, since it is geared for the formation of people who can successfully operate in two or more cultures--presumably the dominant culture and their specific ethnic group. Dr. Gibson also introduces a proposed fifth model, but since it expands the definition of education to embrace realities

outside of the school, I will not touch on it here, since I am primarily concerned with the impact of this curriculum concept on formal education.

Now I would like to turn to the most important part of this presentation--to the questions and issues raised in public school circles by this trend towards multicultural education. These questions are many and varied, involving the philosophy and goals of schooling, and school priorities in the "education" of students.

As an educator, and as an active participant in the public school system, I am quite concerned with the educational dilemmas that seem to be associated with the concepts of multicultural or multiethnic education. Some of these dilemmas are referred to in the literature. Others are not. Be that as it may, my first concern stems from the simple question "What are Schools for?" The advocates of multicultural education look to the schools as a mechanism for the resolution of social problems. Through multicultural education the schools are supposed to eliminate the gangrenes of ethnic prejudice, stereotyping, and even racism from our society. I wonder if this is a viable goal. Have schools in the past, when given the task of solving social problems, been successful? I would venture the answer "not very." Sex education, drug education, human relations training to reduce racism, ad infinitum, have not eliminated these problem areas from American society. But people persist in looking to the schools for the answer. In the words of Henry J. Perkinson (The Imperfect Panacea, American Faith in Education, 1865-1976) schools have not been successful in resolving social problems, but we still insist on "converting social problems into

educational problems and then turning them over to the school in a way for the adult world to avoid facing these problems."

With this history of social failure (even in the area of assimilation, I may add), what makes us think that schools are able to successfully promote cultural and ethnic understanding in the U.S.? In my mind, I keep going back to the findings of the 1975 Adolescent Prejudice study of the ADL that seems to indicate that racial and cultural prejudice is directly correlated to levels of cognitive sophistication among students. Perhaps if the schools were doing what they were traditionally designed to do, to educate and to teach, perhaps this would be a better way of promoting understanding and appreciation. I suspect that schooling in America is failing in both areas, intellectual preparation and development (Note declining test scores and communication skills!) and in the resolution of social ills. Perhaps a return to the traditional educational goals of schooling would be an answer to both problems.

There are so many other unanswered questions dealing with the implementation of the multicultural education idea in public schools. For one thing, will emphasis on this concept help insure ethnic/racial groups of success in our modern technical society. I suspect not. Self-concept, pride and awareness are important, but basic skills, cognitive competence, and useful knowledge, would seem to be more important for success in our competitive economy. What goals should be emphasized, and which are the schools better prepared to emphasize?

Another interesting question involves the balance between ethnic diversity and national unity. Where does the school

draw the line if it is supposed to promote ethnic diversity as a value, but when ethnic values, and I might say ethnic pride, conflict with American ideals that are considered essential to our democratic process. Most advocates of multicultural education would contend that this concept must not conflict with fundamental American ideals, but everyday we hear of cases where ethnic groups, for ethnic reasons, challenge fundamental ideals like the rule of law and the importance of inalienable rights. (A recent case in Miami was that of a city official refusing to voluntarily appear before a grand jury because there were no Cuban representatives on it--is this not a challenge to the rule of law? Should not the law be ethnic blind as well as color blind? Another example would be the recent Muslim violence in Washington, D.C. in which one of the demands was to stop showing a film in New York City. Is this not a challenge to certain inalienable rights?) The question is just how much should schooling contribute to these challenges, and does multicultural education directly or indirectly contribute to such challenges?

Perhaps another question related to this concept, is whether awareness of ethnic diversity will necessarily lead to understanding and appreciation. I would suspect not necesarily so, especially if there is a contradiction between what the school teaches and what society does, or what the "reality" of the ethnic/cultural group is. This relates directly back to the dilemma of using schools as social improvement agencies, without using other societal institutions to also foster change. It also relates back to the area of cognition, since real understanding requires higher levels of thinking. Can the schools foster these higher levels of thinking, given all the other jobs they are

supposed to perform? Perhaps a quote from the Adolescent Prejudice study referred to above is apropos here. In effect it says that awareness through "...contact is more likely to generate tolerance rather than hostility where there is sufficient cognitive ability to understand why the other group is the way it is."

There is still another question which bothers me in regards to the implementation of the multicultural idea. Should not all ethnic and cultural groups be included? But is this possible? In many of the materials I have read an obvious selection takes place, often based on racial considerations. And how about the call by advocates of multicultural education to foster critical thought, to tell it like it is. Would this not present problems if students began to find out that the contributions of ethnic groups to the growth and development of America differ greatly as to kind and degree? Should comparisons and differentiations be allowed that might damage student self-concepts? Are all contributions of equal importance? I wonder. A good example of this type of problem would be Jews, who despite prejudice and discrimination, have made tremendous contributions to American society. How about other ethnic/cultural groups?

Perhaps another problem in the fostering of the new ideal of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity in public schools involves the word "optional" as it is defined in the NCSS guidelines. Would not this ideal be violating the rights of Americans without strong ethnic heritages, those who consider themselves Americans first. Why should they be inundated with ethnicity in schooling, when they would perhaps rather be acquiring skills and competencies that would enable them to make it in our competitive/technical society.

Perhaps the real question is given the very finite situation of schooling in the United States, can public education devote sufficient time, space and materials to really implement and realize the multicultural concept? From where I stand, the future does not look very bright. Given the cyclic nature of public education in our modern era, priorities change. The trend now seems to be towards basic competencies, job survival skills, and universal communication skills. This trend is real, and it has not taken into consideration ethnic differences, at least up until now. A look at the minimal competencies developed by the state of Florida to be used in school promotion testing, and the demands of the high school leaving tests of the states of California and New York, do not reveal any concern for multicultural or ethnic diversity. The priorities are basic skills--communication and computation. Is multicultural education a viable goal of schooling given these new, and obviously publicly demanded goals?

As an educator caught in the dilemma of public education and its multiple priorities, I truly feel that schools are expected to do entirely too much, and that educational priorities have been expanded in such a way that they include numerous goals the schools are ill equipped to achieve. This is not to say that these goals are not noble, or that they do not have any social benefits. However, skills, flexibility and adaptability in the face of constant societal change, should be the principal goals of schooling. I do not believe the promotion of ethnicity should be given equal priority status. Of course, ethnicity and cultural diversity should be respected in schools by teachers and students, and should be integrated into the ongoing curriculum through the use of such things as ethnic and racial examples and heroes to demonstrate concepts, etc. But I have to draw the line

at the use of public education to directly promote cultural and ethnic diversity--one more social goal foisted on the schools by an adult world that can't get its act together...